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### My Willow, by Prosha

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## *My Willow*

The termites invaded through the outer bark, into the heartwood, and finally spread to the phloem. They were settlers building shelters like bees building hives. The colony fed on Willow's wood, scarring, not wounding. Workers and soldiers, they served their queen and led her to Willow's central core. The queen started to lay eggs there, eggs like small blue cells, tissue that had no purpose but death. Willow started to rot from the inside out, the termites curdling her blood and cutting off her branches, making them sticks with no meaning. No treatments helped Willow recover from this pest, not even the chemical ones made Willow rest. The dead wood became the largest part of the tree; a small portion was still catching its breath, praying for rain and sunlight to escape death. That small portion was watched by the evil eyes of a great horned owl, the savagest bird of all, waiting for the sunrise to turn into sunset.

Mid-spring, Willow loosed its elongated leaves. They pierced the lake like needles, stinging. Willow was over and done. Men celebrated new life. Willow's intruders were Willow's best companions.

\*

Not born until 1991, Prosha still recites the story of her family: her parents married in 1984. Her brother was born in 1987. The family lived in Halabja. When the chemical attacks occurred, the family fled on foot to Iran, where they lived until 1990. Her father, currently a member of the Asaish, a branch of Kurdish security forces, returned earlier as a soldier in the Peshmerga. In 1996, after the family relocated to Sulaimani, the Kurdish civil war broke out. The family lost everything in Halabja and had painfully recovered since. Her parents didn't trust the future as war once more broke out around them. They took their children to Holland where the family lived for fifteen years. Only in 2012 did Prosha return to the Kurdish Region of Iraq, to begin her studies at AUIS.

She met poetry through her father. He had memorized verse after verse and would recite it to her, translating from Arabic into Kurdish. It moves her, his voice, the beauty of the verses, the sadness they contain.

She began to write herself, but she never thought her writing good enough for someone else to read. Her greatest fear was that someone would find her diary and publish it, like Anne Frank. The poetry workshop offered her a next step to take. She wanted to practice courage. She thought, "This class will be something of my own, something I will create."

Prosha is simply amazed by all the different poems and authors. She loves to see life through each author's eyes. She loves that she used to read a poem in five minutes and shrug. Now, when she reads a poem, she finds she can spend hours with a single verse. She feels herself searching for the truth one poem can give. She loves that she need not agree on the meaning with others; the poem can hold many meanings to many. "It's a whole world for me, now," she says.



*Photograph by Erin Trieb*